

No poker exception in online gaming legislation

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON – Authors of the new online gaming bill in Congress have issued a challenge to Nevada, where online poker is legal, and any state that may want to legalize it.

“If you want to have online gambling, then come to the Congress. ... If you want to have a poker exception, offer an amendment and see if it will pass,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who introduced the bill this week along with Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah.

The bill, on its face, is simple: It would roll back the 1961 Wire Act to the days before late 2011, when all transactions for online gaming were illegal.

But dig into the details, and it seems certain that this three-page piece of legislation is going to inspire some pretty heavy political conflict.

Read the whole story

Truxlers, LTVA to resume fireworks talks

Mediation in the South Shore fireworks case will resume Monday.

Joan and Joe Truxler of Marla Bay, who brought the lawsuit

against the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority and Pyro Spectacular, and their attorney will be meeting with representatives of the LTVA and their attorney.

Lew Feldman, attorney representing the LTVA, told *Lake Tahoe News* it would be a confidential meeting per federal rules.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Sacramento. The March 31 meeting is in Sacramento.

“Joe and I are determined that this thing can get settled,” Joan Truxler told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It will be settled once LTVA understands how they have gravely deceived the community they are charged with promoting.”

The Truxlers believe an agency other than a fire department should be permitting the fireworks shows that are put on Fourth of July and Labor Day weekend so any pollutants put into the lake are monitored. A problem with that is no state or federal agency says a permit is needed.

In the lawsuit it says each mortar that has been launched in the last five years should count as a penalty under the Clean Water Act, which would to a fine of more than \$70 million for the LTVA.

The Truxlers say the debris from the two 2013 events continues to wash up on Pinewild Beach. The LTVA has cleanup protocols and is willing to improve trash pick up.

The deadline for a resolution is April 4.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Survey: Families a growing segment of tourism

By Scott Sonner, AP

Visitors to the Reno-Lake Tahoe area stayed longer, spent more money and brought their children along more often last year than they did two years earlier, according to a new tourism survey that suggests targeting families in future marketing efforts.

The tourists with kids spent more than groups with only adults and stayed nearly twice as long in 2013 – averaging 6.2 days compared to 3.2 days, officials for the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority said Thursday.

While gambling “remains the core visitor activity, other events and activities are drawing visitors and their dollars,” concludes a report on the survey being presented Thursday to the authority’s board of directors.

“Families are identified in the data as an exciting opportunity for growth. More adults brought their children with them to the area compared with 2011. They stayed longer, spent more and left wanting to return,” it said.

The share of families traveling with children under age 21 increased from 27 percent in 2011 to 35 percent last year. On average, they spent \$773 while adults-only visitors spent \$637, the survey found.

“It not only shows that the region is doing a phenomenal job of retaining loyal customers, but it also proves that the message of Reno-Tahoe as a family friendly destination is drawing a new group of multigenerational visitors,” said Christopher Baum, the visitor authority’s president and CEO.

Individual visitor spending increased 9 percent to \$685 last year, about one-third of that on gambling. About one-fifth of them came for the day and didn't stay overnight. Those who stayed averaged 4.3 days in 2013, up from 3.5 in 2011.

Carlton Geer, president and CEO of the JA Nugget hotel-casino in Sparks, said the results are consistent with the private market research affiliates of Global Gaming & Hospitality conducted before purchasing the former John Ascuaga's Nugget late last year.

"Our research showed the economy was improving in Northern California, the Reno-Sparks area's main feeder market," said Geer, who has launched a \$50 million renovation of the casino with two hotel towers. He said Northern California's economic outlook is the "single best indicator of future success" in the Reno-Sparks area.

Seattle-based EMC Research conducted the Internet-based survey of 2,000 visitors to Washoe County in 2013. Although they also could have visited other parts of Lake Tahoe, to be included in the survey they must have visited within the month prior the North Shore towns of Incline Village or Crystal Bay, or Reno or Sparks.

For the first time among Californians, visitation from Los Angeles equaled visitation from the San Francisco Bay Area – 31 percent from L.A. and 32 percent from the Bay Area, which is within the survey's margin of error of plus or minus 2.2 percent. Two years ago 27 percent came from L.A. Tourism authority spokesman Ben McDonald said Thursday they still are sifting through the data to pinpoint the reason for that uptick.

The biggest visitor "types" remain gamblers (20 percent) and those visiting family and friends (17 percent), followed by about 12 percent each for recreation, sightseeing vacation and vacation in general.

Overall the survey concluded half visited primarily for “fun” (vacation/recreation). Those who do visit mainly to gamble are the biggest spenders as a group, averaging \$1,049 in 2013, while those in the “fun” category spent \$659.

Rick Murdock, vice president of casino marketing at the Eldorado Resort Casino in Reno, said it reflects their guests’ increased interests in outdoor recreation and entertainment.

Eighty-two percent of the visitors surveyed said they had a good or excellent experience. Half said they definitely will return and another quarter said it was very likely.

Caesars seeks to sell 7 million shares

By Howard Stutz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Caesars Entertainment Corp. filed paperwork with the Securities and Exchange Commission Thursday to sell an additional 7 million shares of stock.

Based on Thursday’s closing price on the Nasdaq Global Select, the company would raise almost \$148 million.

No date was given for the proposed sale. Caesars and its private equity owners, TPG Capital and Apollo Global Management, agreed to a 60-day lock-up period after the date of the prospectus filing in which they wouldn’t sell any of their wholly owned shares.

Caesars has undertaken several efforts recently to repair its balance sheet, which has a gaming-industry-high \$23 billion in debt.

Read the whole story

Brown wants disgraced lawmakers to resign

By Chris Megerian, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – Gov. Jerry Brown called on three scandal-plagued state senators to resign on Friday, speaking out for the first time on a series of criminal cases that have sapped Democrats' power in the Capitol and tarnished the Legislature's image.

Brown's statement comes hours after the Senate voted to suspend Sens. Leland Yee (D-San Francisco), Ronald S. Calderon (D-Montebello) and Roderick D. Wright (D-Inglewood).

Friday's vote was the first time the Senate suspended its own members, and the first time Brown called for their resignations.

Read the whole story

Tahoe elementary to be mountain academy

By Kathryn Reed

Sierra House Elementary School is taking the federal Let's Move initiative a step further.

Principal Ryan Galles this week told the Lake Tahoe Unified School District about his goal of transforming the K-5 school into the Sierra House Mountain Academy.

“I envision a physical transformation,” Galles said.

The goal is fitness, health and mountain sports will be emphasized.



Sierra House is being transformed into a mountain academy. Photo/LTN

The initial Health and Fitness Night will be May 1.

The first phase is in place, so the transition to the themed school will not be difficult. It helped that the field was replaced last summer. A grant from Vail Echo had all second-graders at SHES on the slopes this winter. Third- and fourth-graders ride at Sierra-at-Tahoe. The ice rink allowed students to skate in a morning fitness program.

But it's not just about doing things off campus.

Galles told *Lake Tahoe News* it's about creating a more rigorous fitness based physical education program. This will in large part fall on the shoulders of Seth Martin.

“When you are exercising, even as short as 20 minutes, you have a better connection in the brain,” Martin told the school board. He is a physical education specialist for the district,

with this being his first year exclusively at SHES.

In 2010, the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports named Martin physical education teacher of the year. When Martin was at Tahoe Valley Elementary School in 2011 he had the students try to set a world record for jumping jacks. In 2012, he was instrumental in Lake Tahoe Community College and Barton's Tahoe Center for Orthopedics team sports performance summer camps.

The March 25 staff report says, "Research on fitness and the brain indicates that, increased levels of activity stimulates brain activity and increases student achievement. Fitness activities also provide improved attention span, memory and learning, thus reducing stress and the effects of ADHD."

The goals of the academy are:

- Re-orient to a fitness-based physical education program
- Bring in schoolwide fitness and health events
- Provide access to mountain sports
- Increase parent involvement/communication
- Promote healthy lifestyles, cooperative skills, critical thinking and problems solving.

The next phase is to get the growing dome installed. That could be a reality this spring. Approvals from the state are still needed as well as some coverage issues need to be ironed out.

Last March when Galles was before the board he said the dome would have multiple educational purposes. For one, it would be a hands-on science lab where students would be growing vegetables year-round. It would complement the composting program. It would show kids that food comes from someplace else before it reaches a grocery store. And it will give them

something healthy to eat. The state has curriculum in its Garden in Every School program that could be used.

Staff members are going to Truckee in May to visit the dome there and find out about how best to use it as a teaching tool.

A walking path around the school will be the third phase. This will allow for more activities when students are at recess.

Fitness stations and a traverse wall will be in the final phase.

In other action:

- The board delayed action on the proposed preschool center at the former Al Tahoe Elementary School. This would be for transitional kindergarten. It would help with the overcrowding issue at Bijou and Sierra House elementary schools. But parents of little ones are not thrilled with the idea and want more info. The board said more outreach is needed. The topic should be on the April 22 agenda.

Nevadans face higher flood insurance

By Scott Sonner, AP

Washoe County emergency manager Aaron Kenneston has known since Hurricane Katrina slammed into New Orleans and Superstorm Sandy wreaked havoc on the East Coast that Nevada homeowners and businesses eventually would face higher premiums for federal flood insurance.

"It's unfortunate that you have to balance these major superstorms on the backs of taxpayers who don't live anywhere near the Gulf Coast or Hurricane Alley," Kenneston said.

Nearly 1,300 Nevada residents will see such premium increases in the coming years due to changes in the National Flood Insurance Program.

For years, the federal government subsidized flood insurance on homes and businesses built in the days before flood zones were created. But premiums collected haven't covered the payouts, leaving the National Flood Insurance Program \$24 billion in debt.

President Obama last week signed a relief bill that erases the immediate pain of dramatic flood insurance hikes included in a 2012 bill passed by Congress that was meant to reflect the true risk of flooding and end subsidies. Still, policyholders are facing large, repeated rate hikes over the years.

In Nevada, 1,299 flood insurance policies will see double-digit increases. Of those, more than 900 homeowners will see their premiums rise by up to 18 percent each year, and nearly 400 businesses and owners of second homes will see increases of 25 percent annually.

Washoe County, Reno and especially Sparks are among the areas that could feel the sting of rate hikes along the banks of the flood-prone Truckee River, according to an Associated Press review of records from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The analysis shows more than one-third of the 383 owners of subsidized policies in Sparks can expect 25 percent increases in their premiums. About one-fourth of the 1,161 policyholders in Reno and one-fifth of the 1,014 in rural Washoe County face increases of up to 18 percent each year.

"I'm concerned we could start to price people out of the

market who really should have flood insurance,” Kenneston said.

Kenneston and insurance agents said it’s hard to persuade people to buy flood insurance if it’s not required by a mortgage lender.

“Nobody wants to buy it until after they have a flood,” said Tom Wilkins, a longtime Reno insurance salesman.

The Reno-Sparks area has experienced significant floods at least once a decade since the 1950s – the biggest a New Year’s Day flood in 1997 that caused \$1 billion in damage across six counties, \$700 million in Washoe County alone.

“It is a citywide concern,” Sparks city spokesman Adam Mayberry said. “The 100-year flood seems to come around every 10 years.”

The effects of the rate increases won’t be clear until FEMA adopts regulations to implement the changes, but the association of Nevada Independent Insurance Agents is starting to hear concerns and plans to launch a series of classes to help educate its members.

The impact will vary across Nevada, where 14,871 policyholders paid collectively \$8.9 million for \$3.46 billion worth of federal flood insurance in 2012.

For example, unincorporated areas of Clark County had 3,675 federal flood insurance policies in place on Dec. 31, 2012, but only 100 of them were receiving the discounted rates and will be subject to increases.

In Douglas County, 129 of the 1,115 – or 12 percent – were receiving the subsidy in 2012 and now will be subject to similar increases. The same for 96 of 644 in Carson City (15 percent), 63 of 158 in Fallon (40 percent), 54 of 167 in Lander County (32 percent) and 43 of 77 in Elko County (56

percent).

Wilkins said most people who need flood insurance don't find the cost to be prohibitive, typically about \$500 annually for a homeowner.

"It seems like a whole lot of money if you never use it but it's really not as expensive as a lot of people think it is," Wilkins said.

After the 1997 flood, he said his company paid a \$500,000 claim to one Sparks business that had an annual premium of \$2,300 and a \$1 million claim to another that paid about \$6,000 a year.

"You could spend about \$30,000 over 10 years and get a half-million dollars back," he said. "Because it is a guarantee the river is going to flood."

Concrete firm accused of doctoring paperwork

By Kathryn Reed

A local concrete company is being accused of falsifying paperwork involving work done for the city of South Lake Tahoe.

Each year a professional engineer certifies the mix of concrete. While the ingredients, so to speak, don't change, there is a concoction created for each year.

City officials contend Sierra Tahoe Ready Mix used the 2011 batch in 2013. In providing the “old” supply the company also allegedly falsified documents to say this was the current mix.

Ray Jarvis, head of the city’s public works department, told *Lake Tahoe News*, “At this point we don’t think there is a structural issue.”

He says this because at the site samples are taken to test the strength of the concrete.

The “old” concrete was used in at least the Bijou erosion control project. The city is looking at other projects that might be affected.

No one from Sierra Tahoe Ready Mix returned calls.

Officers with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department, El Dorado County Sheriff’s Office and El Dorado District Attorneys Office searched the business this week and came away with undisclosed items. The DA’s office is leading the fraud investigation.

The Chateau project and all of the recent work done in Lake Tahoe Unified School District exclusively used Sierra Tahoe Ready Mix for concrete.

“What really matters to us in the end is if the concrete meets the specifications and comes up to the strength. It has done that 100 percent of the time. There is no question about the Chateau project,” Joe Stewart with SMC Contracting told *Lake Tahoe News*. SMC is building the retail out at the Chateau and is also the firm that put in the original foundation at the site.

Stewart added, “There is a significant amount of independent testing when we pour concrete.”

Thousands of yards of concrete from Sierra Tahoe Ready Mix have also been used throughout LTUSD.

“For every 50 yards of concrete delivered to one of our projects we take a series of test cylinders for the concrete. This is done by an independent engineering firm,” Steve Morales, LTUSD director of facilities, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We never had any concrete that did not meet the ultimate specifications.”

Census: Moderate growth in El Dorado, Placer counties

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

The four-county Sacramento region added 22,000 residents between July 2012 and July 2013, a slightly faster rate of growth than during several prior years, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures released Thursday.

Like much of California, the Sacramento region experienced a slowdown in population growth during the recession. Couples put off having children. Fewer people came here because there were fewer jobs.

As a result, average year-to-year growth from 2009 to 2012 in Sacramento, Placer, El Dorado and Yolo counties was about 20,500, a far cry from the 50,000 to 60,000 new residents seen each year during the housing boom.

Last year's numbers represent only a slight uptick, and they are a far cry from the boom years, but several experts said they may herald a return to annual, healthy population growth of 25,000 to 30,000 residents.

Read the whole story

Nevada casino revenue plummets

Stateline's drop in gaming revenue in February was not as bad as it was statewide.

Throughout Nevada casinos took in \$926 million, a drop of 13.7 percent compared to 2013. On the South Shore the number was \$15 million, for a 10 percent decline.

Reno casinos saw a slight uptick at 1 percent or \$44 million.

Friday was the first time the Gaming Control Board broke out the figures for online poker. That revenue was \$824,000. The first of the state's three online poker sites started 10 months ago. Since that time online poker has accounted for \$8.5 million in gaming revenue.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*